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SUBJECT: IMPRISONED ALGERIAN JOURNALIST MOHAMED BENCHICOU
TO BE RELEASED

¶1. Mohamed Benchicou, former publisher of the now defunct French-language daily Le Matin, is set to be released from prison June 14 according to press reports. Benchicou served a two year prison term for illegal transfer of funds related to the operation of his newspaper, though many believe the real offense he committed was his vociferous public attacks on President Bouteflika during the 2004 presidential election campaign. To mark the day of his release, Benchicou will attend several ceremonies including one to commemorate Algerian journalists killed by terrorist violence during the 1990's and a follow on ceremony to commemorate two journalists killed in 2001. Benchicou will also preside over the awards ceremony for the Benchicou Prize which will be given to two Moroccan journalists in the afternoon.

¶2. Benchicou served his complete two year sentence and was granted no leniency despite national and international interest in his early release. Though he has fully served his sentence, Benchicou faces the prospect of additional prison time as he could still be tried on any of the 32 charges of defamation pending against him.

ERDMAN